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# **A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Accent and Social Mobility in the UK Teaching Profession**

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## **Abstract**

A new interdisciplinary approach to understanding the role of accent in relation to intergenerational social mobility is introduced here. Sociological analyses that attend to accent often focus on broader regional distinctions or construct limiting dichotomies of accents, rather than capturing the full variety and range of accents, often found at smaller geographic levels. Drawing on the case of the teaching profession and using qualitative data collected as part of a study of teachers, we illustrate how integrating sociolinguistics into a sociological analysis of social mobility would allow us to combine the micro-geography of class, mobility, and speech to a more granular level. The analytical tools provided by sociolinguistics, outlined here, could push forward work on understanding prospects for, and experiences of, social mobility.

## **Keywords**

accent, linguistic capital, social class, social mobility, sociolinguistics

## **Introduction**

Accent and speech are central to how social class is distinguished in everyday life. Within sociology, language has been considered central to how racial and socio-economic differences are formed; language expresses the broader power structures present in the society, be they gendered, racial, socio-economic, or spatial or a combination of all of these (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991; Trudgill, 1974). In research on social mobility (defined here as movements in social class positions across generations) in the UK, accent, and in particular the classed geography of a range of accents, has tended not to be central to sociological enquiry. That is not to say that studies have ignored the central place of accent in the experience of working-class people who are upwardly socially mobile (Friedman, 2014; Hey, 1997; Maguire, 1999) but, with the notable exception of Addison and Mountford (2015), it has not always been foregrounded in academic research on the topic. Over recent years, there has been consistent media reporting of the de facto discrimination of particular geographical accents of largely working-class students and teachers across the UK (Garner, 2013). While this has been explored from a sociolinguistic perspective (Baratta, 2016, 2017, 2018), until now sociological research has not sought to draw on valuable concepts and theories from the field of sociolinguistics to address work on social mobility. In this article, we introduce a sociolinguistic perspective on accent to highlight for the first time how a more granular understanding of particular geographical accents can be used to extend social mobility research and a spatially nuanced class analysis more broadly. Thus, our rationale for this article is not merely to fill a gap, but to explain why the gap needs to be filled in the first instance.

## *Accent and social mobility in the teaching profession*

To explore how sociolinguistics can inform a sociological analysis of social mobility, we examine the experience of teachers from working-class backgrounds with strong regional accents. As has been established elsewhere (Baratta, 2016, 2017, 2018; Maguire, 1999, 2005), teaching is a profession where regionally specific working-class accents are often stigmatised by other professionals. Given the suggestion that there might be particular pressures on working-class people to adjust or silence geographically specific accents in the teaching profession, teaching provides a well-suited occupational domain to explore sociolinguistic perspectives for sociology. Such pressures might be internally felt by individuals based on negative perceptions of their regional accents (Coupland and Bishop, 2007) and/or based on the feedback by mentors during teacher training (Baratta, 2018). Furthermore, teaching also has an important role in the history of social mobility, underlining its relevance as an area to explore this topic. Over the 20th century, teaching became a career path that was strongly associated as one of the key occupational destinations for upwardly mobile working-class people from a range of different ethnic and geographical backgrounds and especially women (Apple, 1988; Higginbotham and Weber, 1992).

For these reasons, the article will provide examples of British teachers and the role their accent plays in the construction of a professional identity. In adopting this focus, we will discuss how geographically specific

accents suggestive of working-class origins are deemed a barrier to social mobility. Beyond this, the purpose is to also address an aspect of linguistic usage which is not specifically addressed in the Teachers' Standards within teacher training. While all teachers are expected to use what is known as 'Standard English' (see below), formally there is no explicit mention of a 'standard' accent in the official linguistic constraints on teachers' use of language and Standard English can, of course, be spoken in any accent. It could of course be the case, however, that mentors and senior staff within teaching have specific ideas regarding accents deemed to be 'standard', perhaps tied to the need for teachers to display (as mentioned in the Teachers' Standards), 'articulacy'. Who decides, however, what is, or is not, an articulate accent? The reality for many teachers from working-class and/or peripheral regions is that the denigration of particular working-class accents within the teaching profession is central to how the broader historical and contemporary stigmatisation of working-class culture (Skeggs, 1997; Tyler, 2008) is expressed in this particular occupational field (while Skeggs (1997) and Tyler (2008) were not specifically talking about teachers per se, their wider point is relevant here).

### *A sociolinguistic perspective on accent, class, and social mobility*

The association between accent and class in Britain is well-established and has a long history. In particular, the connotations of speaking with regional accents have tended to be quite negative (Evans and Iverson, 2007; Hughes et al., 2012). Coupland and Bishop (2007) in their study involving the rating of various British accents in terms of attractiveness and social prestige found that accents tied to Birmingham, Glasgow, and Liverpool were rated low in both categories, with the Birmingham accent referred to as 'the *bête noire* of British urban varieties' (p. 84, original emphasis). Historically, much prestige was associated with the accent referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP), itself originally associated with the gentry, aristocracy and, from the 19th century onwards, the uppermiddle classes of South-East England (Mugglestone, 2003). Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that more modern connotations of RP might involve negative attributes of 'affectation, social snobbery, arrogance' (Hughes et al., 2012: 5).

Moreover, the issue of social mobility has become a central policy concern in the UK over the past decade (Roberts, 2012). In Britain, the UK Government's Social Mobility Commission has addressed the role of accent directly through their research. They showed how accent acts as one of the tools by which working-class candidates for careers in finance and life sciences are filtered out, as well as the great linguistic efforts that those who do succeed have to make in order to fit in (Moore et al., 2016: 92–93). We show here the value of a sociolinguistic perspective to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of accent in the sociological study of social mobility, especially considering the fact that, to our knowledge, there are no studies within sociolinguistics that have investigated accent in this manner.

Within sociology, there is also a similar lacuna when it comes to combining sociolinguistics with research on social mobility. Despite the centrality of language to Bourdieu's (1977, 1991); analysis, Bourdieusian analyses of social mobility have largely tended not to dwell on language and accent in great depth. The role of regional working-class accents as a key marker of difference among socially mobile individuals is often recorded but tends to be largely mentioned briefly (Friedman, 2014: 353; Friedman, 2016: 136–137). Lawler (1999: 17–18) discusses in greater depth how regional working-class accents are associated with feelings of being out-of-place in middle-class educational or professional settings. By far, the most detailed account is Addison and Mountford's (2015) exploration of the role of accent in demarcating class boundaries in higher education. They describe how RP is associated with intelligence by students from working-class backgrounds with regional accents, as well as discussing how university staff from lower socio-economic backgrounds adjust their register and accent when they are around academics. In this article, we seek to build on Addison and Mountford's (2015) work and examine in a conceptually more detailed way how sociolinguistics can be combined with the sociological analysis of class, social mobility, and education, using the teaching profession to explore these themes.

To do this, we combine Bourdieu's concept of 'linguistic capital' with a phonological understanding of regional working-class accents and RP. While Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital has been used frequently to discuss the symbolic prestige and economic advantages associated with particular languages in multi-lingual and post-colonial countries (Morrison and Lui, 2000; Smits and Gunduz-Hoşgor, 2003), the number of sociological papers that have examined how linguistic capital works in the UK context is relatively small (Reay, 1999; Zevenbergen, 2001). Of course, we should not forget that in certain contexts it

is working-class accents that will have a degree of capital, certainly if the goal is to forge solidarity through shared working-class accents; in such cases, accents such as RP would perhaps not reflect capital at all (Milroy and Milroy, 1999). In the first section of the article, we address how ‘Standard English’ and RP function more broadly as forms of linguistic capital through the school system. More specifically, we focus on how these forms of English may be changing, as well as examining the phonology of regional working-class accents that underpin the linguistic traumas associated with upwards social mobility.

This more nuanced spatial lens provides the second major contribution of this article, as we show how sociolinguistics can be used to examine the micro-geographies of class and accent. Sociological analyses that attend to accent often focus on broader regional distinctions rather than looking at smaller geographical differences. Hey’s (1997) analysis of how a ‘northern’ accent has particular working-class connotations recognises the lack of nuance in using this broad regional framing but does not really address how a more geographically detailed analysis of class and accent might be developed. In both older and newer works (Friedman, 2014; Lawler, 1999), the micro-geographies of class and accent are not really the core focus of research. Instead, it is the broader embodied experiences of social class that are the main focus. Maguire (1999) and Friedman’s (2014) highlighting of the particular negative class associations of the Essex accent for socially mobile working-class people suggests that a more spatially nuanced conceptualisation of class and accent could be developed. Incorporating sociolinguistics into an analysis of social mobility would allow us to combine the micro-geography of class, mobility, and speech to a more granular level. One example of such a fine-grained approach is provided by MacFarlane and Stuart-Smith (2012) in their discussion of spatial distinctions of accent and class within Glasgow. They found that there was a distinctive, more middle-class Scottish accent which was associated by many research participants with the University of Glasgow and the School of Art. This was seen as differing markedly from a working-class Glaswegian accent. In this article, we put forward the necessary sociolinguistic conceptual framework for a more granular spatial lens for understanding how accent, place, and class combine. This allows us to think relationally about how language and accent are intertwined with particular, local spatial patterns of class formation, which shape and reflect broader relations of class domination and subordination.

In the penultimate section of the article, we provide an empirical example of how a spatially nuanced, phonological interpretation of accent can be combined with a sociological analysis of social mobility. We focus on the experience of teachers in Baratta’s (2016, 2017, 2018) studies of how teachers’ regional accents have been policed by their mentors. Baratta (2016, 2017, 2018) found that some of the northern teachers he spoke to needed to modify their accents in southern professional settings, with the result that some perceive themselves to be linguistic ‘sell-outs’. This abandoning of regional linguistic forms of working-class identity reflects how geographical and class identities combine in ways that are not accepted in certain professional settings. Building on (Baratta’s) research of the context of teacher training, we see that it is often mentors who instruct teachers to modify their accents in the construction of an identity deemed ‘professional’. We also draw on other studies (Maguire, 1999; Moore et al., 2016) to reexamine in greater depth how issues of geographically specific working-class accents are central to experiences of social mobility.

### **Changing forms of linguistic capital in Britain**

Linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) refers to particular varieties of language that represent the most prestigious form within a given society, which in turn implies that its use will afford the speaker a degree of credibility and respect. However, there are implications to this language variety, notably tied to issues of power. Bourdieu argues that it is a matter of social reproduction, in that prestige forms are those that reflect the language use of those in power – traditionally, middle-class White men in Britain – and thus, this variety is socially dominant and is reproduced in schools. This is certainly the case with the variety of English known as Standard English, which is further reflected in the Teachers’ Standards in England (Department for Education (DfE), 2013a). Given that Standard English is the variety propagated in schools, the implication is that this is the language variety that is expected within not only educational contexts but also high-profile careers like Medicine, Law, or the Civil Service. However, Standard English can, as mentioned, be spoken with any accent in light of this, and what are the implications for accents deemed ‘non-standard’ in Britain within the context of social mobility, even if Standard English is otherwise being spoken? In other words, while there is indeed a standard form regarding grammar, are there still notions of standard forms regarding phonology (i.e. the structure and features of accents)? Trudgill (2002) suggests that despite more egalitarian attitudes towards accent in Britain, with greater exposure to regional accents in the media, for example,

‘discrimination on the grounds of accent still, unfortunately, occurs in British society’ (p. 176). Thus, do individuals feel a need to modify their accent in the construction of an identity that they believe is more reflective of, and appropriate for, a more ‘professional’ middle-class occupation, with the teaching profession under discussion here as one example?

However, there is no longer a standard accent as such in Britain. While RP was historically regarded as the *de facto* standard accent (Trudgill, 2002), there is evidence that it is losing its prominence and symbolic prestige within Britain as a whole. Linguists (Przedlacka, 2001; Mompean, 2006) in fact point towards a more recent British accent – Estuary English (EE), originally associated with the South-East of England – as a variety that is argued as becoming more prominent across the country. This is interesting for several reasons, not least as it could suggest the partial decline of traditional forms of 19th- and 20th-century upper/upper-middle class linguistic modes of expression (Griffiths et al., 2008).

Moreover, EE has phonological features that are a combination of both RP and Cockney (Mompean, 2006; Przedlacka, 2001). This suggests that it is essentially a combination of accents that, respectively, have connotations of both elitism and workingclass status. In other words, might we consider EE to be a balance, an accent that is judged to be neither too middle-class nor too working-class? Indeed, Hughes et al. (2012) argue that EE has evolved based on some degree of social levelling. This social levelling may be associated with the partial decline of traditional ‘gentlemanly’ tropes among the British elite which have been reported elsewhere (Griffiths et al., 2008), and in the UK, the BBC has seen a notable shift towards greater inclusion of regional accents (Mugglestone, 2003: 290–291). Tellingly, Cruttenden (1994: 6) refers to a ‘regional RP’, arguing that RP has been affected by regional varieties, such as Cockney. This is important given that RP, while historically based in South-East England, has evolved into a class-based accent, irrespective of one’s region of origin, but is nonetheless susceptible to regional influences. What EE may represent is a new culturally dominant English accent, associated in particular with lower-middle to upper-middle-class individuals in London and the South-East (Altendorf, 2003). In the post-war period, RP was noted to be under threat and Gimson (1964, in Beal, 2004: 189) predicted that ‘one of the regional standards will come to be recognised as the new national standard’ going on to highlight that ‘the speech of the educated classes of the south of England’, as opposed to that of the English gentry, would most likely provide this model. Altendorf’s findings rather support this conclusion and Maidment (1994) has similarly suggested that EE is situated on a spectrum, between Cockney and RP, falling somewhere between the two. It does seem to have risen alongside the partial decline of RP and the linkage between the two is clearly complicated (Mugglestone, 2003: 285–290). EE seems to represent both a democratising trend within English accents and the maintenance of a dominant south-eastern England middle-class accent, a softening of RP which allows it to sit within the broad class spectrum of EE.

This reflects linguistic change in the society, which in turn has implications for the role of accent in social mobility. However, while there is much research on attitudes towards accents in Britain (Coupland and Bishop, 2007), we have scant information on what exactly are the specific phonological features that deem certain accents desirable, and part of the ‘dominant’ classes, and others less so. In line with the shifting prestige of RP and EE’s rise, there is also evidence that regional accents which retain their regional flavour, but avoid more broad realisations, have greater acceptance among younger generations (Coupland and Bishop, 2007). Again, this suggests a more ‘midway’ accent and is reflective of there being suggested standard accents across the country (e.g. a standard Liverpool accent and a standard Birmingham accent). More recent sociolinguistic research (Baratta, 2018) points towards more legitimate accents in Britain – those that carry some capital, though not necessarily being symbolically dominant – as generally being those which may have regional influences but without the strongest or broadest regional accents. This, as mentioned, also reflects a desire to avoid a singular standard on the old model of RP dominance, but instead allows for multiple standards based on a given region. These intra-regional distinctions further suggest how sociology might seek to explore how micro-differences in accent within region are associated with regional class structures (Pearce, 2009). While British individuals arguably have a rather intuitive notion of what a ‘broad’ regional accent sounds like, we need to clarify and bring analytical precision to this on a phonological level.

### **Insights from sociolinguistics: the phonology of accents**

Accent is an unconcealed and overt expression of self that carries the possibility for instantaneous classed, racialised, gendered, and sexualised judgements to be made. It is an attribute that can be used to position

oneself within the social world, as well as to be positioned by others. It is one element of how mechanisms of respectability and disgust shape and create class positions through assigning clothing, food, body types, and forms of speech particular symbolic value (Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Tyler, 2008). In this context, accent modification in the context of moving into a middle-class occupation is not a simple ‘choice’ but carries with it substantial psychic and personal emotional cost and disruption to people’s sense of self (Lawler, 1999; Reay, 2005). Notwithstanding the social positioning of accents, from a purely linguistic point of view, accent is nothing more than a particular system of pronunciation, made up of the placement of specific phonemes (units of sound) in specific contexts. Let us illustrate this by considering the word ‘back’, with the transcriptions below based on an RP accent and that deriving from Liverpool (albeit a broad Liverpool accent):

RP /bak/  
Liverpool /bax/

Both accents would use a short-a sound, but the phoneme used by the Liverpudlian speaker [x], referred to as a voiceless, velar fricative, is, in more everyday terms, the sound heard in the Spanish j – an aspirated ‘h’ made in the throat (e.g. imagine a strong ‘h’ sound). This is a very infrequent sound in English, with only Liverpudlian and some varieties of Scottish English employing it. The question is, essentially, is this one example of a specific sound, which others may make judgements about, that in turn causes the accent as a whole to be judged in a particular way? Certainly, given the infrequency of this sound in many Englishes, it could be regarded as a ‘marked’ form. Regardless of a particular accent’s phonemic inventory, in this case the guttural nature of the aspirated h sound, the larger issue would appear to be a given accent acting as a linguistic symbol of the negativity attached to its region of origins. Thus, a stigmatised region and/or class level is attributed to the accent that is representative of such and subsequently, the speaker. Reaching further back, in analysing the contemporary and historical connotations of Liverpool’s accent and the city’s working-classness, Belchem (2006) argues,

Scousers articulate a constant stream of prosodic patterns and segmental features which distinguish them unmistakably as Liverpudlians. Their identity is constructed, [...] by how they speak rather than by what they say. Instantly recognisable, the accent is the essential medium for the projection and representation of the local micro-culture, the ‘scouse’ blend of truculent defiance, collective solidarity, scallywaggery and fatalist humour. (p. 33)

This highly specific local classed culture and identity is embedded within the accent and speech of Liverpudlians, and this distinguishes the city even within the North (Belchem, 2006: 45–46), underlining the importance of a spatially nuanced analysis of accent. Belchem’s analysis flags the deep centrality of language and accent to collective and individual identities and the historical formation of accent as a constituent part of Liverpool’s identity through various phases of migration and political struggle. Thus, certain sounds, in certain contexts, act as linguistic stand-ins, symbolic for the broader perceptions and actual histories attached to the area the accent derives from. Language and accent act as an embodied marker of geographical origins as well as class, and it is the combining of the two that shapes the difficult socio-cultural terrain that socially mobile individuals must traverse.

As mentioned, we need more information on the phonological realisation of an accent deemed to be working-class, not to mention regional accents deemed to be ‘less broad’, while nonetheless still tied to a specific region. What specific features of a given accent mark it as ‘working-class’ which in turn are tied into the negative stereotypes ascribed to different geographical working-class identities. We provide an illustration below that can help to shed light on this area. We focus on the Manchester accent, using the word ‘Saturday’ as an illustration:

Broad /saʔdɪ/  
General /satədɪ/  
‘Neutral’ /satədeɪ/

The use of a glottal stop [ʔ] has often been regarded as a marker of ‘less educated’ and informal speech (Millar, 1997; Schleef, 2013). It is often associated with the Cockney accent, such as the pronunciation of *water*, in which there is a noticeable stop of air between the ‘a’ and the ‘t’. However, it is also heard in the

North of England, with another example being *party*, which would be realised as /pa:ɹɪ/ with a broad Mancunian accent. Likewise, the reduction of the long-a sound in *day* to a short-i sound is also reflective of what might be considered a more broad Mancunian accent (hence, less ‘standard’), but by avoiding the glottal stop, it is comparatively *less* broad. This ties in with individuals who declare they ‘don’t have an accent’ (or an accent deemed to be ‘neutral’); in reality, we all do of course, but the implication of such declarations is that the more local features (glottal stops, phoneme reduction) are absent and thus contribute to making the accent less recognisable as, in this case, Mancunian. In turn, this can work to eradicate the more negative stigma of a certain region/class by phonologically moving away from such.

However, the factor that would mark a Manchester accent as being Mancunian, regardless of level, is the fact that words such as *party* would utilise a low, front vowel – [a]. This is a feature of Northern speech in general in certain words (e.g. *bath*), as opposed to what we would expect to hear in RP and Southern speech in general, which would involve a low, back vowel [ɑ]. To give a clear picture on this, imagine the word *bath* as realised in the North/Midlands of England and its pronunciation in the South. Likewise, the word *party* has two broad realisations, certainly in England:

North/Midlands /pa:ɹɪ/ (here, a more ‘general’ version, hence no glottal stop)  
South /pa:ti/

Going further, we might suggest that reductions are a common feature of stigmatised speech, often beginning in childhood (e.g. being told not to drop one’s g’s, such as *goin’* for *going*). Although Burrige (2016) regards reductions as a legitimate part of speech, it might be that reductions represent a collective category which is regarded, in higher social circles, as an example of ‘non-standard’ speech, however, in this case, non-standard as synonymous with working-class speech. Another specific example of a reduction is a sub-category known as elision, which involves the deletion of an actual phoneme. For example, in Yorkshire, words such as ‘go’ might be realised, in more broad speech, as /go:/. This is contrasted with the pronunciation /goʊ/, which might be considered more ‘standard’, in light of the fact that the second pronunciation is based on the use of a diphthong (i.e. two individual sounds which combine to make a new sound – here, ‘o’ + ‘u’). In broad speech, it is reduced to just one sound – [o] – referred to as a monophthong or pure vowel (this was also seen in the reduction from a long-a sound to a short-i sound in the Mancunian accent examples).

Despite the lack of a formally standardised accent, explicit or implicit expectations around particular accents and the devaluation of local working-class accents in professional contexts might be an issue for working-class people with strong local accents. Recent Social Mobility Commission research suggests how elite professions in finance and life sciences remain powerfully dominated by south-eastern accents associated with elite schools (Moore et al., 2016). What is notable from Moore et al.’s work is the differentiation of intra-London accents – there is a clear distinction between the forms of speech deemed acceptable in the elite London spaces of high finance and those that might be used a short distance away in East London schools. The continued de facto expectation of specific accents in particular elite professions suggests that there is a continued hierarchy of pronunciation even *within* London. Referring to a unified ‘southern’ accent is missing these kinds of nuances within cities themselves. This implies the continued symbolic power of a particular form of south-eastern middle-class speech, even if the precise form of this speech and accent is changing and moving away from the conventional RP model (Mugglestone, 2003). The continued association between ‘good schools’, accent, and elite employment strongly implies that despite the changes in RP, there remains a form of less accented, more formal English which retains significant symbolic value.

## Methods and data collection

There is a total of four studies (conducted from 2014 to 2017) which provided potential material for inclusion in this article regarding the accounts of teachers and their accents; however, for purposes of space, only a few accounts have been selected. Study 1 took place in 2014 and obtained, via questionnaire, the responses of 92 British individuals regarding accent modification. Six of these responses were from teachers, five of whom were established and one of whom was a trainee.<sup>1</sup> Study 2 took place later in 2014 and interviewed 11 trainee teachers from two Northern universities. Study 3 was conducted in 2015 and obtained

the views of 15 trainee teachers from two Southern universities via questionnaire, which was chosen as a more feasible method to collect data given the distance involved with travel. Study 4 in 2017 interviewed a further nine established teachers who comprised a private primary school (six teachers), a state primary (two teachers), and a state secondary (one teacher). The criteria for inclusion in the studies were that the teachers had to be British or Irish; subsequently, all participants within the four studies were from Ireland, England, and Northern Ireland and as such were native speakers of English (and most relevantly, spoke with accents regional to the United Kingdom and Ireland).

The following regions were represented based on participants' self-described accents: North of England – 20, South – 7, Midlands – 4, Northern Irish – 4, RP – 3, Republic of Ireland – 2, Scottish – 1. Each of the four studies explored what role accent played in the construction of teachers' professional identities in terms of if teachers had chosen or had been told by mentors/senior staff, to modify their accents at all to varieties deemed more 'suitable' for the teaching profession. In terms of the focus on class and social mobility, the teachers' account selected for this study are those in which participants specifically referred to their class level within their responses – in this case, a reference to working class origins. Although class is arguably in need of further unpacking, the fact that participants self-described this way is sufficient for the purposes of this article in that, given this self-identity, it is one which would necessarily include accent as a symbol of class origins.

### **Accent and social mobility in the teaching profession**

In this section, we present some examples of the comments that were made by mentors in order to, from their point of view, ensure that the teachers were understood by their students. Teachers with strong regional accents experienced this as stigmatising of their own class and geographical backgrounds. Notably, a secondary art teacher, Susan, with a self-described 'strong South London' accent, was told by her mentor to write the word *water* with a capital T, as a means of avoiding the glottal stop in her speech. While the mentor felt that glottal stop usage was not 'professional', Susan (from Study 3) believed instead that it allowed her to be perceived by her students as more 'real'. Susan explained,

He was very patronising and tried everything he could to change my accent...I struggled every day with the feeling that I was never good enough. Not good enough to teach, not good enough in the work environment and not good enough to pass the course.

Legitimate forms of speech, such as that encouraged by Susan's teaching mentor, have 'to be sustained by a permanent effort of correction', enacted across the field of education (Bourdieu, 1991: 60). Her accent here was deemed by her mentor to be incompatible with her professional identity as a teacher, which she experienced as deeply undermining of her feelings of self-worth. However, while her accent did not serve as a form of legitimate linguistic capital within the terms set by her mentor and the normative expectations of teacher training, as she explained, she believed that through her identity and her accent she brought a bit of 'reality' to the school. By this, Susan was referring to the fact that her otherwise unmodified accent signals to her an identity of someone who is proud of their class- and regionally based roots and does not see this as incompatible with the teaching profession. She further stated that this reality was based on the fact that her unmodified accent meant that she sounded 'more like (the students)' and different from the 'normal teachers'. This overall suggests that, to Susan's mind at least, an unmodified accent, one which signals working-class origins, need not have to change for a career in which she is otherwise qualified, and by choosing to keep it (linguistically) real, she believes that she is signalling that she is genuine, in part by not adopting an accent which is otherwise 'fake'. Her mentor, however, regarded her glottal stops as symbolic of an identity incompatible with a professional context. Susan explained that she is 'very proud (to be) from Croydon, from the "ghetto" as the kids call it'. Despite the pressures to adhere to legitimate forms of speech, the strength of Susan's geographical and class identities expressed through her accent and the value she gained from this in her interactions with students could not be completely suppressed.

Likewise, a teacher from the Midlands, Agatha (from Study 3), was told by her RP-speaking mentor that it was 'best to go back to where you came from' if she could not use Southern pronunciation in words such as *bath* and *umbrella*. Agatha explained that 'I feel that if I modified my accent it would impact on my personal identity, as I am not ashamed of the fact that I am from Leicester, and I feel some people's comments imply I should be'. These examples reinforce the findings of Maguire (2005) that language and accent is a medium



through which teachers' professional and class identities are policed and restricted. There is clear conflict between the classed and geographical identities of these teachers and the 'professional' identity they are expected to adopt through their voice. The benefits of sounding more 'real', with teachers with local working-class accents benefitting from 'insider status' with working-class students (Maguire, 2005: 432–433), are ignored. This suggested 'realness' points not just to the self-perceptions of the teachers, but the perceptions of the students also. That is, if students hear a teacher with an accent perceived as working-class, then this might suggest to them that the teacher is not, put bluntly, putting on linguistic airs and graces by modifying to a less broad accent. Although this is but merely one perception, it is of course a possibility (and one which Susan believed to be true in her case). Despite the formal recognition given to aspects of ethnic or religious diversity, standardised, class-based, and a-spatial, non-localised forms of speech are still the norm for teacher training. RP may have declined in influence, but a homogenising, a-spatial accent still produces symbolic capital for teachers in the field of education and devalues those who do not adopt it (Bourdieu, 1977). As one teacher puts it, 'you say we've all got to sound the same which is a bit backwards' (p. 49).

It is worth underlining the parallels here with Maguire's (1999, 2005) earlier works on experiences of accent and class in teacher training courses. While as noted above there have been linguistic changes that have weakened RP, the notion of a standardised form of English in schools underlines how local, working-class accents remain stigmatised and 'inappropriate' for the language of teaching. As Ramsaran (1990) argued, the notion of a standardised form of speech and accent like RP which removes traces of one's region of origin from speech still retains a powerful influence with implications for both upwardly mobile working-class teachers and students alike.

Adopting a 'professional' accent often involves a loss of self in order to achieve legitimacy within the profession. The evidence from these teachers suggests that accruing sufficient linguistic capital within teaching still relies on the silencing of local and more 'informal' forms of working-class speech. Furthermore, there are power implications to consider also, given that teachers are modifying their accents based on the directives of those who wield power over them in the workplace, such as mentors. While some teachers wish to retain their otherwise 'non-teacher accents', there is a perception that mentors on teacher training courses in schools and universities view them as inappropriate for the context of teaching. Despite the absence of a standard British accent, however, the word 'standard' (and non-standard) is nonetheless referenced in previous studies (Millar, 1997), suggestive of what might be considered a rather intuitive concept regarding an accent that is considered to be appropriate for certain professions and indeed the classroom. This article suggests that the phonological reality for such accents is a need to avoid reductions in speech, such as glottal stops, with an ultimate realisation being an accent not being perceived to be associated with either upper middle-class or lower working-class identities. In short, there is still a policing of accent and class in the language of working-class teachers with local accents. The more archaic forms of RP are now less common, but the stigmatisation and 'inappropriateness' of local accents and speech have not changed; the symbolically dominant form of language and accent within teaching remains a-spatial, thus serving to mark out teachers and students with local, working-class voices.

From Study 1, an interesting account was provided by John, who recalled an interview for PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) course. John is from Rossendale, in Lancashire, and describes his accent as marking him out as working-class, which he further described as having connotations of him being 'straightforward' and a 'hard worker'. These were not the connotations felt by the interviewer, however. John explained that 'a couple of minutes into the interview, the man interviewing me said he was stopping the interview'. John went on to explain that this was based on his accent, with the interviewer's rationale being that 'headmasters would be afraid that the pupils would go home and complain to their parents that the man teaching English couldn't teach it himself'. John agreed to modify his accent in order to get a place on the course, but felt 'disgusted in (himself) for attempting to appease the man's bigotry'. This provides a clear example of the connotations one's working-class accent means to the speaker, versus the connotations to someone established in education, respectively, connotations of being 'straightforward' versus connotations of being, broadly, unprofessional. In the state secondary school, a teacher from Bristol, Simon (from Study 4), admitted that he had modified his accent for a career in teaching, all too aware of what he perceives to be the negative connotations of his Bristolian accent. In terms of what this modification involves, he did not pronounce his r's in the classroom, thus adopting a non-rhotic accent. A non-rhotic accent is one in which the

letter 'r' is pronounced only before vowels (e.g. red); in Bristol, where rhotic accents are the relative norm, the letter 'r' is pronounced in all positions within a word (e.g. car park):

The Bristolian accent has lots of connotations. Normally, things like village idiot, yokel, farmer, you know, friendly but stupid ... agricultural ... so because of that once I came into contact with people that had softer accents and accents from elsewhere ... you have these kind of stereotypes that exist and it wasn't doing me any favours.

While Simon did not reference class specifically, his references to connotations of farming and yokels are not suggestive of a middle-class background. He further explained that as a result of modifying his accent to a variety that is less pronounced, it allows for him to be perceived in a more positive light:

(Modification) carries some power, that carries some respect and people assume people are educated and confident, as if they've broken free from the shackles of being poor or being thick.

Simon strongly suggests that the perceptions of his otherwise unmodified accent are nonetheless relied on to such an extent to form negative judgements. As a teacher, modification was thus felt to be necessary to not merely fit in better, considering he teaches in Manchester, but to create a new identity of someone who is socially mobile; perceptions of being 'poor' and 'thick' are clearly at odds with such an identity. Given that rhotic accents in England carry connotations of being 'unsophisticated' and lead to 'Farmer Giles' imagery (Barras, 2015: 277), it makes sense that this one particular sound was removed from Simon's speech. In constructing a hoped-for identity (Hecht et al, 2001) via, partly at least, removing his 'r's, Simon in turn explained that this impacts on his otherwise personal, non-teacher identity. He explained that as a result of this upwardly mobile identity he has created, it means that 'you kind of present yourself, slightly fake, falsely to people'. Linguistic standardisation here comes at great personal cost; the geographical and linguistic cost of adopting a 'successful' professional identity as a teacher are just as powerful here as other aspects of identity loss that occur when people are socially mobile (Reay, 2005). The psychic costs of linguistic discipline through standardisation of accent and speech also affect students, who revert to more standard forms of English at school as opposed to at home (Austin, 2014). In the case of Simon, the removal of his 'r's is an example of an identity forged on linguistic adjustment, which, while creating a professional identity, weakens his regional identity in the process. These tensions are similar to those discussed by Maguire (1999) and Lawler (1999), whereby accent comes to be a key dimension along which the tensions and ruptures involved in shifting class position are experienced. Maguire's work here is particularly relevant as it describes how a working-class teacher from Essex experienced prejudice and judgements because of her accent at a high-performing state school.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

While existing sociological work has mentioned accent in the form of 'regional accents' and 'RP' and highlighted the social penalties often faced by those with 'regional accents', we have shown here that a sociolinguistic perspective can add a level of precision and detail that could be helpful in extending this work. A sociolinguistic examination of accent shows the intricate nuances of different accents, moving beyond these binaries of 'regional' and 'RP'. Adopting this perspective shows, for example, that it does not make sense to speak of a 'northern' accent, or even a single 'Manchester accent', with a myriad of phonetic styles and features permeating speech patterns of different individuals and groups. These theoretical tools could help us go further in understanding the formation and crafting of social identities, and social class formation in particular. It could help, for example, in understanding the distinctions between those from similar social class backgrounds who are geographically dispersed, having grown up absorbing different kinds of phonetic styles and features. These phonetic styles and features are likely to be important identifiers in the ways individuals (regardless of class) come to subjectively experience and make sense of their identity. Further empirical work could use some of the tools outlined here to understand social identity formation for those growing up in different geographic locations. For example, it could explore the significance of phonetic styles in the ways young people craft their identities and make sense of themselves in relation to the 'other'. Conceptualisations of social class identity have often been devoid of accent, despite its exposed and open nature which makes it an immediate identifying characteristic. Accent may be as powerful, if not more powerful, than other cultural and social dispositions in terms of the ways individuals position themselves and are positioned by others in the social sphere. Drawing on the sophisticated set of tools developed in sociolinguistics adds further nuance to existing conceptualisations of social class identity in the UK.

Sociolinguistic perspectives on accent could also further develop existing work on understanding prospects for, and experiences of, social mobility for different groups across the UK. It is the combination of social class identity and accent that shapes and defines the difficult socio-cultural terrain that socially mobile individuals must traverse. The example of the teaching profession drawn on here illustrates how accent adaptation can be an integral part of upwards mobility for some. We can take the understanding of accent developed here, as a means to better understand just how inclusive high-status professions and occupations really are in terms of accent diversity or, as the case may be, there is a need to leave one's accent at the door (part of it anyway) before being admitted. Rivera's (2016) study of the hiring practices adopted by elite American firms showed that for one socially mobile individual, his particular Southern accent was seen as 'charming' by recruiters. This example illustrates how different accents can carry very different interpretations and potential consequences for social (im)mobility. While this is focused on recruitment outside the United Kingdom, it still paints a relevant picture of the role that accent can play in terms of how people are perceived, perceptions that can point towards implied suitability for the job in question. A more comprehensive and detailed comparison of the role of accent across different occupations and professions would provide us with a more graduated view of how accent works differently as a barrier to acceptance and material advancement across different fields of middle-class life.

Sociolinguistics could help push forward work on understanding processes of social (im) mobility by providing a more fine-grained lens to study how social mobility occurs (or not) in different occupations. It is particularly valuable at identifying how certain spatially specific accents (moving beyond just 'regional' accents in a UK context) might limit prospects for social mobility for some. For example, are specific Mancunian or West Country accents perceived negatively in certain professions? How inclusive are professions (and particular elite firms) of the variety of accent styles that exist in the UK and what are the implications for social mobility?

The difficult experience of being effectively split between two worlds and two identities has a particularly important linguistic dimension that is worthy of greater sociological enquiry. For some, a personal identity linked to one's classed identity with all its various dispositions might not be a comfortable fit in the professional realm. To then abandon aspects of one's personal identity – here, accent – in order to create a better fit can lead to a sense of not belonging completely to either identity (of course, the possible 'benefits' of being able to socially navigate multiple worlds must also be recognised, as discussed by Abrahams and Ingram (2013)). From a purely accent-based perspective, this can lead to what might be called 'linguistic homelessness' (Baratta, 2018) as we saw earlier in the case of the Bristolian teacher. Adopting this sociolinguistic perspective, further work is needed to understand the social consequences of moving into spaces where an individual's accent in particular is marginalised and excluded (above and beyond their social class identity). In addition to social class, geographic location is one area of enquiry gaining momentum in sociological work on social mobility, and an accent-based perspective is one lens that could help to more precisely foreground spatial inequalities relating to social mobility.

## Note

1. By 'established' teachers we refer to individuals who were already working within the teaching profession, whereas 'trainee' teachers refer to those who were enrolled on a teacher training course, specifically the PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education).

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